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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the use of contemporary legends in the teaching of language and culture, specifically in English-as-a-second-language. Contemporary legends are a type of folk narrative, but unlike folk tales, they are believed to be true. They usually concern ordinary people who are known to the narrator, occur in familiar settings, and are generally conveyed orally. Drawing on her experience teaching in a variety of cultures, the author encourages other teachers to use contemporary legends as authentic texts for teaching both culture and communication skills. The paper presents adapted stories and accompanying questions and class activities, and offers seven sample lessons using some of the texts. Specific classroom techniques, and some caveats for the teacher, are noted. (Contains 13 references). (MSE)

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The Cognitive Hookman:

Using Contemporary Legends in the ESL/EFL Classroom

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Teaching degree at the School for International Training Brattleboro, Vermont

by

Carolyn Layzer

December 1993

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary legends are a universal form of oral narrative that can serve as a rich and versatile resource for teachers. This paper examines their use in the teaching of language and culture. The content, style, and performance of contemporary legends are discussed, and a rationale for using them in the classroom is presented. Samples of story outlines and full texts illustrate the adaptation of contemporary legends for classroom use. Examples of ways in which legends can be used in the classroom are presented in the form of seven sample lessons and follow-up activities built around both cultural learning and communicative language learning objectives.

Possible ERIC Descriptors:
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION 1

2. BACKGROUND: WHAT ARE CONTEMPORARY LEGENDS? 4

3. RATIONALE FOR USING CONTEMPORARY LEGENDS IN THE ESL/EFL CLASSROOM 9

4. STORY OUTLINES AND GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS . . . 13

5. SAMPLE LESSONS 25

6. SAMPLES OF FULL TEXTS WITH QUESTIONS AND THEME WORDS 54

7. CAVEATS 70

8. CONCLUSION 74

APPENDIX 77

WORKS CITED 79

1. INTRODUCTION

A few years ago, when I was teaching EFL in Taiwan, I thought it would be interesting to use folktales to get students speaking in the classroom. Folktales are so interesting and reveal so much about our culture that I thought this would be a great way for me to gain insight into the students' value systems. Of course, they would have scores of tales to tell.

But when I introduced the idea to them, they claimed to know no folktales at all. They seemed bored with the folktales of other countries, and they could not relate them to their own culture. In desperation, I asked for any stories they could think of.

They flooded me with stories about ghosts! One of the stories sounded very familiar, though. The students all knew it and told it cooperatively: one began, another would interject a bit and carry on, then another would pick it up. This is what they told me:

> A taxi driver was driving down the road late one evening when a woman standing on the side of the road flagged him down. She got in, told him the address she wanted to go to, and paid him in advance. He thought this was a bit odd, but he didn't say anything.
>
> She sat silently in the back seat. He checked his rearview mirror now and then, but she never moved. To get to the address she'd given him, they had to pass through a tunnel. After he'd driven through, he looked back and she was gone!

> Mystified, he drove as quickly as he could to the address she'd told him, but when he arrived, he saw that there was just a burned-down ruin of a house. Astonished, he looked at the money she had given him only to find that it was "ghost money"! ["Ghost money" is the money used in offerings to ancestors who have entered the spirit world.]

Like many others, I had heard this same story as a teenager, but when I heard it, the woman was dressed in a long, white dress. She had been killed on her wedding night. In other popular versions, the elements are remarkably similar, but just enough local information is provided to make it believable -- almost!

After leaving Taiwan, I began keeping my ears open for universal stories. While teaching in Ecuador, I tried for the first time to introduce the story of "The Vanishing Hitchhiker" and to elicit local versions and reactions from a group of low-intermediate students. The response was encouraging: students could easily relate to the modern, urban setting of the story and some of them had even heard that very story. One student told a similar story but with names of local places and people she knew. Other students told about their own experiences hitchhiking, and about other ghost stories they'd heard. Every student contributed in some way. Although the activity was not controlled, students had a genuine desire to communicate in any way they could, and they enjoyed it.

That was the beginning of my journey down the road to using contemporary legends in the classroom. My aim in writing this paper is to make teachers aware of contemporary legends as a source of authentic texts for use in the classroom, both in the teaching of culture and in the teaching of communication skills. By showing how

I have adapted stories and compiled questions and activities to accompany them, I hope to encourage teachers to develop materials using stories they already know (freeing them from having to rely on books as sources).

In addition, I will illustrate a variety of ways in which to use the stories by presenting sample lessons using some of the texts (in story and outline form) included in this paper. Some of the lessons are explicitly for the purpose of developing communication skills while others focus more on cultural perspectives. The purpose of each lesson is stated at the beginning of the lesson. Purposes range from encouraging creative response to reinforcing individual language skills, especially oral/aural skills. Other stated purposes are to explore cultural themes and to encourage critical examination of information in newspapers and other mass media forms. My aim in showing various types of purpose is to encourage teachers to view contemporary legends as a rich and versatile source of content in the classroom.

2. BACKGROUND: What are contemporary legends?

I began collecting contemporary legends somewhat inadvertently, but gradually I've become more and more fascinated not only with the form and the variety of these legends but also with how widely known they are. I'll tell one story in a teachers' room, and suddenly the room begins to buzz as people jump in with their own versions, competing tales, authentification, or at least reactions.

Contemporary legends are a type of folk narrative, but unlike folktales, contemporary legends are believed (by the teller and usually by the listener) to be true. They usually concern ordinary people in settings familiar to members of the audience. The narrator usually either knows the people about whom the story is told, or else the person is a "friend of a friend" (referred to as a FOAF in folklore circles). The legends are usually conveyed orally but are sometimes found in newspapers, magazines, and photocopied flyers on bulletin boards, among other places.

One rich source of contemporary legends in print are the books by folklorist Jan Brunvand. He discusses the evolution of contemporary legends as being the process by which we transmit folklore

> more or less accurately... In this stream of unselfconscious oral tradition the information that acquires a clear story line is called *narrative folklore*, and those stories alleged to be true are *legends*. This, in broad summary, is the typical process of legend formation and transmission as it has existed from time immemorial and continues to

> operate today. It works about the same way whether the legendary plot concerns a dragon in a cave or a mouse in a Coke bottle. (Brunvand 1981: 1)

"The Mouse in the Coke Bottle" is one of the urban legends appearing in Brunvand's first collection of contemporary legends, The Vanishing Hitchhiker: American Urban Legends and Their Meanings (1981). The story is that a man is drinking a bottle of Coca-Cola when he notices a strange taste. When he pours the rest of the drink out, bits of a mouse are revealed to have been in the bottle (See Chapter 5, "The Mouse in the Coke Bottle").

The report of parts of a mouse being found in a soft drink bottle is from an actual case, reported in the Washington Post in February, 1971. However, numerous other reports of rodent parts and other contaminants (glass, cockroaches, pieces of metal) in soft drink bottles have been documented (although not verified) all over the country. In fact, as I'm writing this paper, another soft drink scare has been raging around the country: the syringe in the Diet Pepsi can (see Appendix for newspaper articles concerning this matter). Though not a single allegation has been confirmed, most people have heard the story (even major television networks and respected daily newspapers carried it) and many people may have heard it as having happened to someone they know, or know of (a FOAF!).

However, the point of using these stories is not to determine whether they are true or not but to discover why people tell them at all. As Brunvand writes,

> Simply becoming aware of this modern folklore which we all possess to some degree is a revelation in itself, but going beyond this to compare the tales, isolate their consistent themes, and relate them to the rest of

> the culture can yield rich insights into the state of our current civilization. (Brunvand 1981: 2)

Prejudices, values, and fears appear boldly in many of the stories, while in others they are couched in symbols and metaphors. Local versions are tailored to local conditions, including local prejudices, fears and values.

An example of this would be in the story "The Choking Doberman" in which severed fingers of a burglar are found lodged in a dog's throat. In some versions the fingers are specifically said to be black (belonging to a black burglar), indicating local racial prejudice and resulting fears. Other local variations (such as names of local streets, areas, stores, etc.) tell less about local values but add to the feeling of veracity.

Contemporary legends are told in a variety of contexts for entertainment, promotion of social codes, and as sincere warnings. The style varies greatly depending on the teller, the context, and the purpose of telling. Most often, the performance is oral and so informal that initially, most people don't even recognize the stories as legends, but rather believe that the event described in a story they heard actually happened. They may have heard the story told complete with local details such as names of people, places, or a specific time.

These legends exist throughout the United States and the rest of the world. Although details vary and are adapted to fit local conditions, the essential nature of the act of telling a legend is universal (Ellis 1991, Bronner 1990). It is political in that the origin of any given legend is a social context, and the goal of the telling is to

somehow alter that context. This is clear when the function is to warn listeners of danger or to initiate discussion about an unfamiliar situation or the process of change.

A key aspect of contemporary legends is that they are believed to be (or told as being) true. This sets them apart from other oral folk traditions such as jokes, rumors, ethnic jokes, and anecdotes (Brunvand 1981: 3, Ellis 1990: 2). In using these legends, my aim is not to question the veracity of the story or the feasibility of the events in it, but rather to encourage the telling, and with it the examination of our beliefs.

The origins of contemporary legends lie in folktales, actual events, and common fears concerning the dangers in life. Like folktales, they usually contain certain stable elements and other variable elements. The former comprise generalized descriptions of basic stages in the plot, which remain stable across versions of an individual legend. For example in the stories about the vanishing hitchhiker, stable elements would be:

1 - driver, on the road at night
2 - picks up hitchhiker (usually female)
3 - hitchhiker vanishes
4 - explanation given by local residents

The variable elements are introduced with each telling of the story as tellers embellish or adapt stories to fit local conditions. Taking the example of the vanishing hitchhiker stories, the teller might describe the man driving the car, the make of the car, the road conditions, the local scenery, the name of the place where the events occurred, the appearance/clothing of the hitchhiker, etc. Of course the explanations vary widely!

Another feature of legends, including contemporary legends, is the presence of pairs of opposites: old/young, life/death, home/away from home, good/bad, reality/fantasy, etc. Even locating pairs in a story provides students with a challenging puzzle as many of the pairs are not overtly mentioned, but rather depend on interpretation.

Recently, folklorists have begun to look more closely at contemporary legends as a legitimate form of modern folklore. Consequently, many of the legends have been analyzed, discussed, and written about in journals, books and magazines. The supply of legends seems infinite, and interpretations are numerous. Using the classification system devised for cataloguing traditional folktales, folklorists have found many common threads running through the tales.

For TESL/TEFL professionals who may not have access to the research tools at the disposal of folklorists, however, I suggest that it is unnecessary to go into such great depth in order to use the legends. Reasonable consideration, analysis, and examination should be sufficient preparation for using any given text. [On the other hand, many of the legends may not be suitable or appropriate for classroom use -- containing violent or gory elements -- so it is worthwhile to consider each one with care. This aspect of using contemporary legends will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 7 (Caveats)]. In the next chapter, I will present my rationale for using contemporary legends in the classroom.

3. RATIONALE FOR USING CONTEMPORARY LEGENDS IN THE ESL/EFL CLASSROOM

The contemporary legend is by definition a modern narrative form. Because these stories are told in English throughout the English-speaking world, they are a culturally authentic form. Alice Omaggio, in her working hypotheses for a proficiency-oriented approach, gives as a corollary: "A proficiency-oriented methodology emphasizes the use of authentic language in instructional materials wherever and whenever possible" (Omaggio 1986: 47). Contemporary legends are authentic in form and content. If told by a native speaker in a natural context, they become authentic language; if told in English by a teacher, they are simulated authentic language -- still appropriate for increasing the proficiency of learners. Furthermore, the situation of telling and re-telling stories is an authentic language interaction.

Another reason to use contemporary legends is that the act of storytelling is one in which genuine communication is possible and there is immediate feedback from the listener. Usually the listener does not know the story being told or may know a slightly different version of the story. In either situation, the listener has an incentive to listen: either the story is so compelling that the listener is engaged (the majority of these stories have familiar settings but unusual or bizarre occurrences) or the listener knows a slightly different version and will get the opportunity to tell it. If

the story is new to the listener, he or she will ask for clarification from a peer teller (perhaps more readily than from a teacher or native speaker telling the story).

Storytelling is a technique that is appropriate for language learners of intermediate or higher proficiency. It is appropriate because the type of skills demanded in the activities around storytelling -- paraphrasing, gisting, grasping nuance, and inferring meaning -- are skills which learners at an intermediate or higher level are ready to develop (Omaggio 1986). Many of the activities suggested in this paper are most suitable for high intermediate to advanced proficiency learners. It is possible to work with this material with learners at a lower proficiency level, but it might be frustrating since at lower proficiency levels learners are working at developing other skills. On the other hand, it could be that the material itself is compelling enough to motivate students to stretch themselves, to push past the boundaries of their proficiency level. This has been my experience.

In fact, one of the great strengths of contemporary legends is that these are stories we actually tell, albeit sometimes in a much reduced form. (When both speaker and listener are familiar with a version of the story, the exchange could be as short as, for example, "Do you ever remember hearing about the alligators in the New York sewers?", "Yeah.", "Well, I hear they found some in Seattle.") In their full form, they are a product of the culture in which they are generated and thus contain cultural codes. Unraveling the metaphors and symbols and critically examining the fears, prejudices and values beneath them is an important part of using these legends to learn about culture.

If students begin to think critically about this form of transmission of culture, they may gain a better understanding of the world around them and their role in shaping it. Who has never told or never listened to one of these stories? Once one is aware of the power of the act of transmitting a legend, though, the act takes on greater significance and carries responsibilities for the teller. (Are you deliberately deceiving the listener? If so, why are you doing it? Is your purpose to entertain the listener, to instruct, to warn?)

Another strength of contemporary legends is their availability. Since contemporary legends are found all around us, they are accessible to the teacher whose text resources are limited. Sources in print are numerous and include local papers, tabloids, office bulletin boards (including electronic bulletin boards), and popular novels. Other media sources include the radio, television, and even popular songs. But the best thing about these stories is that everybody knows a few of them, so it is possible to get new versions from native speakers and even to translate versions from speakers of other languages. Learners and non-native speaker teachers are excellent sources of contemporary legends.

I have included samples of some contemporary legends in this paper. Most of them are stories I have heard but vaguely remembered. Using Brunvand's books has facilitated the development of materials. Although it is not necessary for teachers to use them, I think his books provide an excellent jumping-off point for teachers interested in pursuing using this material in the classroom. In the following chapter, I

will present outlines of some contemporary legends and discuss ways of preparing them for use in the ESL/EFL classroom.

4. STORY OUTLINES AND GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS

Below are some basic outlines of popular contemporary legends which I have distilled from stories in The Vanishing Hitchhiker(Brunvand 1981), The Choking Doberman(Brunvand 1984), and The Mexican Pet(Brunvand 1986), from newspaper articles, discussions in teachers' rooms, conversations on buses and at informal gatherings.

Guidelines:

As mentioned earlier, the legends are often emotionally loaded and could be inappropriate for use in some classrooms, depending on the context and the students. In order to prepare for the kind of effect a given story might have in a given classroom, I suggest that teachers use the following guidelines to help clarify their own feelings about the stories before using them in the classroom:

First, read through the story outline. Then try to recall whether you have ever heard a version of the story yourself. If you have, try to recall the details of the telling. Do you remember hearing different details? Where were you when you heard the story? Who told it? Were other people present? What was your relationship to the teller? What do you think was his/her purpose in telling you the story? Did you believe it or did you question its veracity? How did it make you

feel? Did it change your thinking about that person or the theme of the story? What kind of influence did it have on subsequent actions that you took?

You may have other questions that will help you to do a pre-analysis of the story. Many of these stories are told for very specific purposes or are only told by certain people in special circumstances. By searching your own experience with a particular story, you are preparing for how your students might react since they may also have heard it before encountering it in the classroom.

The story outlines are in simple sentences rather than in the way you might hear them told (or see them if they had been written as a story). The purpose of doing this is to remove as many of the variable elements as possible. Those are the elements that a storyteller will naturally add in the telling. To test this, read the story outline to yourself, then try to tell it to yourself -- I think you will find yourself adding all sorts of things. These "things" are what make oral narratives unique and interesting. [For contrast, compare one of the full versions from Chapter 6 with its outline below.] For classroom use, you may want to modify the story outlines according to the level and vocabulary of your students. Think of them as semi-scripts for oral narratives.

The Story Outlines:

Below I have listed a base form (a) of each legend followed by some variants (b, c, etc.). These are just outlines; the versions you and your students may have heard may be different from those outlined here.

List of story outlines:

1. The Kentucky Fried Rat
2. The Mouse in the Coke
3. The Licked Hand
4. The Hippie Babysitter
5. The Cement-Truck Driver's Revenge
6. The Choking Doberman
7. The Hook
8. The Runaway Grandmother
9. The Dead Cat in the Package
10. The Frozen Chicken Thief
11. Mrs. Fields Cookies
12. The Killer in the Backseat
13. The Vanishing Hitchhiker
14. Incautious Swimmer

1a. "The Kentucky Fried Rat"

- A family goes out to eat dinner (the evening meal) at a fast food restaurant.
- They eat in the car.
- They can't see the food because of darkness.
- The wife/mother complains that the food tastes unpleasant/strange.
- The husband/father turns on the lights.
- The couple discovers that the wife has been eating fried rat.
- The wife is sickened/dies.

1b. Two couples (instead of a family) go out to dinner together to a fast food/"foreign" food restaurant.

1c. One couple gets take-out food and spends a romantic evening at home in front of a fire; the woman complains, etc.

1d. Instead of fast food, they are eating junk food or "foreign" food (Chinese, Korean, etc.).

1e. One person chokes on the food, is rushed to a doctor who discovers a rat bone lodged in his/her throat.

2a. "The Mouse in the Coke"

- A man buys a Coke.
- He notices an odd taste.
- He pours out the rest of the drink.
- He finds pieces of a mouse: back legs, tail.
- He's sickened/dies.
- Charges are brought against Coca-Cola Bottling Company.

2b. Another soft drink is named: Diet Pepsi, 7-Up.

2c. Other contaminants are named: cockroaches, glass, metal, syringe.

3a. "The Licked Hand"

- Parents leave their daughter alone in the house at night with their large dog to guard her.
- They warn her to lock all of the windows and doors after they leave.

- After they leave, she goes around the house carefully checking that each window is locked. She is able to lock all but one very small window in the basement.
- She's not afraid because her dog is there to protect her.
- The dog sleeps under her bed.
- Before falling asleep, she reaches out to pet the dog. It licks her hand. She falls asleep.
- During the night she wakes up when she hears a sound. She reaches out for the dog. It licks her hand. She falls asleep.
- She wakes again, hears drip-drip-drip, reaches for the dog; it licks her hand; she falls asleep.
- In the morning, she goes into the bathroom. She finds the dog hanging from the shower, its throat slit, blood dripping (drip-drip-drip). She finds a note stuck on the mirror: "Humans can lick hands too."

3b. Instead of one girl alone, the girl has a friend sleep over at her house to keep her company (the dog still sleeps under the bed and gets killed).

4a. "The Hippie Babysitter" (originally set in the 60s/early 70s)

- Parents of a small baby go out to a dinner party leaving the baby with a new sitter. The sitter is a teenage girl who looks a little bit freaky/spacy.
- In the middle of the party, the mother decides to phone home.
- The sitter answers the phone. She tells the mother, "The turkey's in the oven."
- The mother, alarmed, convinces her husband they must leave immediately.
- They rush home, find the table set for a big dinner. The mother rushes to the oven, opens it.
- Inside the oven is the roasted baby.
- The sitter was on LSD/other drugs.

4b. The sitter reassures the mother, "Don't worry. Everything's under control. I'm just putting the turkey in now." The mother rushes home and finds the baby still alive in the (warm) oven.

4c. No phone call. The parents come home to find their baby sleeping soundly. Several days later, a friend of the mother overhears two teenage girls on bus discussing ways of quieting crying babies. One says she usually turns on the gas in the oven and puts the baby's head in the oven "for a few minutes" until it goes to sleep.

5a. The Cement-Truck Driver's Revenge

- A cement-truck driver in Michigan is delivering a load of wet cement mix to an address near his own house.
- He decides to detour to his house to say hello to his wife.
- When he reaches his house, he sees a shiny new Cadillac in the driveway.
- He goes around to the back of the house and hears voices coming from the kitchen.
- He sees a well-dressed man talking to his wife in the kitchen.
- He immediately goes back to the Cadillac and rolls down the window. He backs his truck up to the car and pours wet cement mix into the window until the car is full.
- That evening when he comes home from work, he finds his wife in tears.
- She explains that the new car was a surprise she had bought for him with her hard-earned savings. The stranger was the Cadillac dealer who had delivered the car (and was helping her fill out the paperwork on it).

5b. The cement truck driver happens to be driving by his own apartment building when he sees his friend's car parked in front.

- He stops the truck and goes in to say hello.
- When he enters his apartment, he hears voices coming from the bedroom and realizes his friend had come to see his wife, not him.
- He goes back outside, pulls back the sun roof of the friend's car, and backs the cement truck up to it.
- He pours cement into the car.
- By the time the lover comes for his car, the cement is completely hard.
- The car is towed away. It is not reported to the police.

6. "The Choking Doberman"

- A woman comes home from work and finds her large dog lying on the floor, choking.
- She rushes the dog to the vet.
- The vet tells her not to worry, he'll take care of dog, she should go home.
- She returns home, opens the door; the phone is ringing.
- The vet is on the phone. He tells her to leave the house immediately, go to her neighbor's house.
- As she opens the door to leave, she hears the sirens of arriving police cars. The police rush in and search the house.
- They find a burglar in the hall closet, bleeding profusely from one hand.
- The vet arrives and tells the woman he operated on the dog and found two fingers lodged in its throat. He called the police immediately.

6b. Instead of a burglar, it was a mail carrier/election leaflet distributor who put his fingers through the mail slot (to try to break in/steal/retrieve something). The person is later found in a search of local emergency rooms where he has gone for medical attention.

7. "The Hook"

- Two lovers park in lovers' lane. While they are necking, they listen to the radio.
- A news bulletin comes over the radio reporting the escape of a dangerous criminal described as having a hook instead of a hand on one arm.
- The woman becomes nervous and insists that the guy take her home.
- Reluctantly, he agrees. He screeches out of the lane and speeds to her house.
- When they reach her house, he gets out and goes around to open her door for her. He sees on the handle of the car door a bloody hook.

8a. "The Runaway Grandmother"

- A family goes on a camping vacation (in Canada).
- Because the grandmother hasn't been feeling too well lately, they are afraid to leave her home alone, so they bring her along.
- They pack everything on top of the station wagon (camping equipment, canoe, etc.), they all get in, and set off for the long drive.
- They set up their camp near the lake. Everyone is enjoying it, except for Grandma who still isn't feeling too well.
- In the night, Grandma dies. The family doesn't know what to do -- it's a strange place, they don't know where or to whom to report the death, etc.
- They decide to go back home (New Jersey).
- They pack everything, roll the grandmother's body in blankets and put it inside the canoe on top of the car.
- They drive for hours. Finally, they stop for lunch at a restaurant (Howard Johnson's).
- After lunch, they come out and discover the car has been stolen. They report the theft to the police, but neither the car nor anything in it (including the body) is ever found.

8b. Instead of Canada, the family goes to Mexico. While driving across the desert, they stop at a truckstop for lunch.

8c. They put the body in the car with them, but after several hours, they can't bear the smell any longer, so they stop and put it on top of the car.

9a. "The Dead Cat in the Package"

- A woman lives alone downtown in an apartment building with her cat.
- One day the cat dies.
- The woman doesn't know what to do with the dead cat. She doesn't want to throw it in the garbage but has no place to bury it.
- She calls her friend who lives outside the city in the countryside. The friend agrees to bury the cat on her property. They arrange to meet downtown in a department store.
- The woman wraps the cat in brown paper and puts it in a small paper shopping bag.
- She decides to do a little shopping while waiting for her friend.
- While looking at (scarves/earrings/other) she lays the bag on the counter.
- When she looks back a minute later, the bag is gone.
- She tells the clerk. The clerk expresses sympathy and explains that they have been having trouble with shoplifters lately.
- The woman doesn't press the issue; she leaves the store.
- At the door to the street a small crowd has gathered around a large (200 lb) woman who has fainted. In her hand is a shopping bag with the head of a dead cat sticking out.

9b. The shoplifter dropped the bag when she fainted. When the ambulance arrives, the woman is put on a stretcher. A thoughtful attendant places the bag on her chest.

9c. When the owner of the cat is talking to the clerk, a scream is heard from the dressing room. When they rush into the dressing room to investigate, they find a large woman (unconscious) on the floor of the dressing room. Next to her on the floor is the shopping bag and the unwrapped dead cat.

10. "The Frozen Chicken Thief"

- A shoplifter tries to steal a frozen chicken from the supermarket by hiding it under her/his large hat.
- Unfortunately the lines are very long at the cash registers.
- While standing in line, the shoplifter faints and is taken to the hospital where s/he is treated for over-cooling/freezing of the brain.

11a. "Mrs. Fields Cookies"

- A woman buys some Mrs. Fields cookies at a mall one day.
- She likes them so much that she calls the company and asks for the recipe.

- The clerk tells her, "OK. That'll be two-fifty. Shall we bill you?"
- The woman says yes.
- A week later, she receives the recipe and a bill from the company for $250. When she calls the company to report the error, they tell her that it is indeed the correct amount, two-fifty, two hundred and fifty dollars.
- Enraged, the woman decides to get her revenge by sending the recipe to everyone she knows. She also sends a copy to the advice column in the newspaper, asking them to print it as a warning to others who might be fooled as she was.

11b. Nieman-Marcus cookies instead of Mrs. Fields

11c. Waldorf-Astoria Red Velvet Cake instead of cookies.

12a. "The Killer in the Backseat"

- A woman was visiting friends in another city and leaves their house late at night.
- As she's starting up her car, she notices one right behind her starts up.
- As she is driving away, she notices the other car follows.
- She gets onto the highway and is surprised to see the car is still behind her. It's following her very closely, sometimes pulling up almost even with her car, sometimes flashing its headlights at her.
- She keeps speeding up, but the car stays with her.
- She turns off at her exit, looks back -- the car is still following her.
- When she gets into the city where she lives, she starts taking different roads trying to lose the car behind her, but she can't lose it.
- When she arrives at her house, she leans on the horn to alert her husband. He comes out of the house as she's getting out of the car.
- The man in the car behind her gets out of his car at the same time and rushes towards her. The husband runs over, says, "What's going on here?" and grabs the guy.
- The wife tells him how the guy had followed her the whole way.
- The guy explains, "I followed your wife because I was getting into my car to go home when I noticed that as I turned my lights on, a man's head bobbed down in her back seat."
- The husband goes over to the backseat of her car, opens the door, and pulls a man out...

12b. The person who follows her is a burly truck driver.

12c. The person who notices the man in the backseat is a gas station attendant. When she stops to buy gas the attendant uses some pretext to get her out of the car, into the office so that he can tell her.

13a. "The Vanishing Hitchhiker"

- A man and his friend are driving down a country road at night.
- They stop to pick up a (female) hitchhiker.
- She sits in the back seat. She describes her house and says it's only a few miles up the road.
- The driver reaches the house.
- The hitchhiker is gone.
- The driver gets out of the car and tells the residents of the house what happened. He asks them whether the girl was in the house.
- The residents give him an explanation.(She's their daughter, but she died several years ago and was last seen hitchhiking on that road.)

13b. The girl was cold, so one of the men gave her his jacket. After talking to the people in the house, the two men drive out to the village cemetery and find the girl's grave. Draped over the tombstone is the man's jacket.

13c. Instead of two people in the car, it's one man driving alone. The girl is wearing a long white dress, like a long-sleeved wedding dress, and a veil over her face. When they arrive at the place where he was to drop her off, she turns to thank him, lifts the veil. Her face is a skull -- he notices that she's just a skeleton/ghost. (people in town give him an explanation)

14. "The Incautious Swimmer"

- A group of teenagers go swimming in a local swimming hole.
- They jump out of the car and one of them yells, "Last one in the water is a rotten egg!"
- He jumps in first but immediately yells, "Go back! Stay out of the water!"
- When his friends get him out of the water, they find that his body is covered with bites from water snakes.

How to collect contemporary legends:

I have said that it is possible for teachers to find these stories without purchasing texts. Here are some suggestions for how teachers can go about finding and collecting contemporary legends.

1. How to find stories:

   a) Use one of the stories in this paper. Tell the story to other teachers, friends, local merchants -- whoever you talk to every day, and get their responses; elicit other versions, other stories.

   b) Tell the same story to your students and elicit responses, other versions, other stories.

   c) Ask students to write any story they know, fact or fiction. Use their stories in class and save them for use with other classes.

   d) In the United States, many urban/contemporary legends appear in major daily newspapers in such columns as "The Real Scoop" by Cecil Adams (syndicated), Herb Caen's column, Ann Landers' column, and in papers like The National Enquirer (although the majority of the stories in that paper are not believable and would not qualify as contemporary legends).

2. Record the stories you find:

   a) Write them in outline form (see examples above).

   b) Keep track of different versions, noting the variable elements.

c) Tape record tellings, when possible.(students, teachers, friends, the local grocer, etc.)

d) Carefully note the names of people and places in the different versions you get as these add credibility to the stories.

3. Catalogue the stories you acquire:

a) Analyze each story yourself to see what possible themes or messages it contains. Check for submerged patterns or images that may tell something about conflicts/issues in the lives of the tellers.

b) Record themes/messages that emerge from student discussions in class -- these may be different from one group to the next.

4. "Accessorize" the stories:

a) Collect pictures from magazines, newspapers, flyers, etc. that could illustrate some part of the stories you use (See Lesson 6).

b) Collect pictures your students draw to illustrate pieces of the legends; draw your own illustrations.

Share ideas with other teachers and with friends: they are the best sources of these legends!

5. SAMPLE LESSONS

In trying to decide how to use contemporary legends in the ESL/EFL classroom, I sought examples of how other kinds of stories have been used. The techniques presented here should be familiar. Many have been passed down, like folk tradition, by teachers I have worked with. Others I found presented in a clear fashion in a book called Once Upon a Time: Using stories in the language classroom (Morgan and Rinvolucri 1991).

With each lesson plan I have laid out the purpose for using the technique. Each lesson is accompanied by a text in order to illustrate the technique or to demonstrate ways of adapting texts for different techniques. Finally, I have suggested some follow-up activities that could be used with any of the lessons.

The lessons appear in the following order (in parentheses are the names of legends which accompany them):

Lesson 1: Cooperative Telling ("The Vanishing Hitchhiker")
-to reinforce oral skills (creative)
-to reinforce writing skills (creative)

Lesson 2: Story Making and Re-Telling ("The Licked Hand")
-to encourage creative response
-to encourage strategic competence
-to reinforce Listening/Speaking or Reading-Writing/ Speaking

Lesson 3: Parallel Stories ("The Kentucky Fried Rat" and "The Mouse in the Coke")
-to explore cultural themes
-to reinforce Listening/Speaking or Reading/Speaking

Lesson 4: Story Differences ("The Runaway Grandmother")
-to reinforce oral skills (R/S or L/S)
-to practice agreeing/disagreeing

Lesson 5: Newspaper Story ("The Syringe in the Pepsi")
-to explore cultural themes
-to critically examine information
-to reinforce oral skills (R/S or L/S)

Lesson 6: Picture Warm-Up ("The Choking Doberman")
-to reinforce listening skills
-to encourage creativity in predicting

Lesson 7: Word Warm-Up ("The Hook")
-to reinforce listening skills
-to encourage creativity in predicting

Possible Follow-Up Activities
-Questions
-Brainstorming themes
-Theme word search
-Debate
-Responsive writing
-Problem posing

Lesson 1: Cooperative Telling

In this technique, the students participate by elaborating details of the story. Thus, each student creates his/her own version of the story which she can share with others either orally (Procedure A) or in written form (Procedure B).

Purpose: A) to reinforce oral skills: Students improve their aural comprehension in short guided listening passages and practice creative speaking.
or B) to reinforce writing skills: Students improve their reading or aural comprehension in short passages and practice creative writing.

Space: one classroom

Materials: text (see sample below)
paper or prepared sheets for students

Procedure:

1) Before beginning the story, go over any unfamiliar vocabulary (so as not to interrupt the flow of the story once you begin the telling).

2A) Tell the story as shown, stopping at the italicized instructions (see example, following page). You may either read the instructions, or you may distribute sheets to the students with instructions on them. Students write their description or elaboration. You should gauge how much time students will need and tell students how much time they have to complete each piece. At this stage, it is not necessary for them to write in complete or grammatically correct sentences: the aim is for them to get their ideas down on paper quickly.

Once students have finished writing their descriptions/ elaborations, you tell the next part; repeat the cycle until the story is finished.

3B) At this point students will have the part of the story you told in their minds (so, not word for word) and will have the parts they created on paper. Give them a few moments to look over what they have written and prepare to tell their story to a partner. When they are ready, students pair off and tell each other their stories.

4) Once they finish telling the stories, they should compare and contrast the elements. Do the stories have a common theme? What is it? Finally, elicit from the class some of the themes/messages they have found in their stories.

Follow-up: Suggestions follow the story text in Chapter 5.

2B) Same as (2A) except students receive the printed story text and read/write rather than listen/write.

3B) Students write a draft of their story from the notes they have jotted down and what they remember of the story. Students work in pairs to clarify what they have written. For homework, they rewrite the story. In the following class, go on to step 4 (same as (4) above).

To illustrate the technique, I have modified the text of "The Vanishing Hitchhiker." A mini-outline of the story follows:

* a driver at night
* picks up a hitchhiker (female)
* she sits in the back seat
* the driver reaches the house
* the hitchhiker is gone
* the driver informs the residents
* the residents give him an explanation

The teacher tells the story approximately as follows, pausing for students to read the italicized instructions from their papers:

This happened years ago. A man and his daughter were driving down a country road late at night.

> *Describe the scene. (What kind of car was it? What was the weather like? What was the countryside around them like?)*

It was dark, but they saw a young woman standing on the side of the road hitchhiking.

> *Describe the hitchhiker. (What did she look like? What was she wearing?)*

They asked her where she was going and she told them she lived with her parents in a house just a few miles up the road.

> *Describe her house. (What color was it? Was it a big house or a small house?)*

So they drove a few miles, and when they came to the house she had described, they drove up the driveway. They turned to make sure she got out OK, but she had vanished! Mystified, the man and his daughter got out of the car and knocked on the door. A man answered the door. His wife joined him.

> *Describe the man and his wife.*

The driver began to explain what had happened. When he had finished, the couple explained that the young hitchhiker he described was indeed their daughter, but...

> *Finish the story.*

Sample Student Sheet:

The Vanishing Hitchhiker

1. Describe the scene. (What kind of car was it? what was the weather like? What was the countryside around them like?)

2. Describe the hitchhiker. (What did she look like? What was she wearing?)

3. Describe her house. (What color was it? Was it a big house or a small house?)

4. Describe the man and his wife.

5. Finish the story.

Lesson 2: Story Making and Re-Telling

In this technique, one group of students hears the story and re-tells it to the other group; the second group makes a story from a "word rose" (see example on following page) composed of key words from the base story (stable elements in the legend) and tells its story to the first group. By having the two groups engage in different activities, variety and initiative are kept alive in the classroom. In selecting stories to use, look for slightly longer ones that will provide enough elements for students to work from.

Purpose:
a) to encourage creative response (students respond to the collection of words and create a story based on that response)
b) to encourage strategic competence (students do not need to repeat the story word for word)
c) to reinforce Listening/Speaking or Reading-Writing/Speaking skills

Space: 2 rooms/places

Materials: 1 text (teacher makes the word rose from the outline -- see example below)

Procedure:

1) Divide the class into two groups.
Group A receives the "word rose." In pairs or small groups, they make up a story around the words.

Group B hears the story told. Then in pairs, they prepare to re-tell it (helping each other to recall the events and the sequence).

2) Bring the groups together. Pair students from group A with students from group B. Students exchange stories (orally).

3) Combine two pairs or re-form into triads/small groups. Students compare/contrast the elements of the stories (orally).

4) One or two tell their versions to the class (volunteer). Elicit: Are there themes/messages in these versions?

5) Elicit: Are there themes/messages in the stories you heard in your groups? Brief group discussion.

6) Writing Follow-up: Think about one of the themes or messages and write either an essay about it or a response to that aspect of the story.

7) Prepare for discussion in the next class:
With a more advanced group, you may be able to explore further by providing some general elaboration questions for the discussion of cultural themes:

1. What are the main elements and what do they represent?*

2. What is the message present in the story? What can we infer about U.S. culture knowing that this story is widely told?

3. Now tell us about your own culture/society/ neighborhood: Have you heard a story like this one? Tell us. Compare and contrast it to the story you heard. Why do you think those similarities and differences exist? What does it tell us about your culture/society/neighborhood?

* For example, if the story of "The Licked Hand" (see below) were used, specific elements could be:

little girl	-> vulnerable female
big dog	-> protector
killer	-> danger/threat from the outside world
little window	-> vulnerability/ condition
sleeping/nighttime	-> vulnerability/condition
licked hand	-> seems to be reassuring but is deceptive

To illustrate this technique, I have selected "The Cement-Truck Driver's Revenge":

A "word rose" of the story (give this to group A) might look like this:

cement-truck
driver

wife

another man

shiny new car

ruined

jealousy

surprise

An outline of the story (use to tell the story to group B):

- A cement-truck driver in Michigan is delivering a load of wet cement mix to an address near his own house.
- He decides to detour to his house to say hello to his wife.
- When he reaches his house, he sees a shiny new Cadillac in the driveway.
- He goes around to the back of the house and hears voices coming from the kitchen.
- He sees a well-dressed man talking to his wife in the kitchen.
- He immediately goes back to the Cadillac and rolls down the window. He backs his truck up to the car and pours wet cement mix into the window until the car is full.
- That evening when he comes home from work, he finds his wife in tears.
- She explains that the new car was a surprise she had bought for him with her hard-earned savings. The stranger was the Cadillac dealer who had delivered the car (and was helping her fill out the paperwork on it).

Lesson 3: Parallel Stories

In this technique, students hear or read two different stories whose plots or themes are parallel. In examining the similarities and differences, themes/messages emerge. This is especially appropriate if you are using the stories for exploring cultural themes/values. In selecting stories to use, choose stories that could bring out themes/topics you're interested in exploring.

Purpose: a) to explore cultural themes
b) to reinforce Listening/Speaking or Reading/Speaking skills (Group A: Listening/ Speaking; Group B: Reading/Speaking)

Space: 2 rooms/places

Materials: 2 parallel texts (enough copies of one text for half the class)

Procedure:

1) To warm up, do a quick "picture differences" activity to get the students in the frame of mind of looking for similarities and differences. The aim here is to promote transfer of comparing/contrasting visual images to doing the same with mental images.

2) Divide the class into two groups. If you have students who are slower readers, you may want to put them in group B, but if you do this activity more than once, rotate the groups.

Group A: Send group A to another room/place where they can't hear the story you're going to tell the other group. Give them each a copy of one of the stories and instruct them to:
-read the story
-note significant features and questions (on a separate page)
-When they finish reading, they can confer with each other (in pairs or threes) to answer questions they may have and to prepare to tell the story to a member of group B.

Group B: While the other group is reading, tell the second story to group A. You may need to tell the story twice.
-The first time, students just listen.

-During the second telling, students may jot down key features of the story.
-In pairs, students prepare to tell the story to a partner from group A.

3) Bring back group A. Collect the copies of the story (to prevent them from simply reading it aloud and to encourage them to tell it in their own words). Students form new pairs with one member from group A and the other from B. (If you have an uneven number, you can have two from the same group in a triad.) Students tell each other the story they heard/read.

4) Once they have exchanged stories, they can either remain in pairs or join another pair so they're in groups of 4 (or 5) and compare/contrast the elements of the stories. They should try to identify common themes. This exercise requires some practice, so you may have to guide them the first time around. One option is to do one of the follow-up activities (see "Follow-Up Activities") to get them started. As they work with these stories, though, students should become more adept at making connections and spotting themes.

To illustrate this technique, I have chosen "The Kentucky Fried Rat" and "The Mouse in the Coke." Below are the full versions and the story outlines (use the full versions as reading texts, the story outlines as a guide for your telling):

"The Kentucky Fried Rat" (heard in 1971 from a federal employee in Washington, D.C.):

"One night a family went out for Kentucky Fried Chicken. The father came back to the car with the bucket of chicken. The couple and their two kids were all sitting there eating their chicken when the wife said, "My chicken tastes funny." She kept on eating, complaining the whole time.

After a while, the husband said, "Let me see it." He switched the light on and then it was discovered that the woman was eating a rodent, nicely floured and fried crisp. The woman went into shock and was rushed to the hospital.

It was reported that the husband was approached by lawyers representing the Kentucky Fried Chicken chain and offered the sum of $35,000. The woman remained on the critical list for several days. Spokesmen from the hospital would not divulge the facts about the case and nurses were instructed to keep their mouths shut. And it is also reported that a second offer was made for $75,000, and this too was refused. The woman died and presumably the case will come to court.
(Brunvand 1981: 85)

Story Outline for telling:

"The Kentucky Fried Rat"

- A family goes out to eat dinner (the evening meal) at a fast food restaurant.
- They eat in the car.
- They can't see the food because of darkness.
- The wife/mother complains that the food tastes unpleasant/strange.
- The husband/father turns on the lights.
- The couple discovers that the wife has been eating fried rat.
- The wife is sickened/dies.

"The Mouse in the Coke Bottle" (report of an actual case from the *Washington Post*, February 3, 1971):

A 76-year-old Falls Church man was awarded $20,000 in damages yesterday on his claim that he was "permanently sickened" by drinking a bottle of Coca-Cola that contained part of a mouse.

George Petalas was awarded the settlement by a Fairfax County Circuit Court jury, which debated for two hours.

In his suit, Petalas claimed that he bought a 10-cent bottle of Coca-Cola on March 20, 1969 from a vending machine in a Safeway store at 3109 Graham Rd., Falls Church.

He took two swallows in the presence of a store employee, William Wheeler, Petalas said, when he noticed "a strange taste." He and Wheeler then went outside the store and poured the rest of the bottle on a driveway, Petalas testified. At the bottom, Petalas contended, were the back legs and tail of a mouse.

Petalas was hospitalized for three days at Arlington Hospital following the incident, he testified. He alleged through his attorney, Robert J. Arthur, that he has since been unable to eat meat, and has lived on a diet of grilled cheese, toast and noodles.

Petalas, who lives at 4418 Duncan Drive, Falls Church, asked $100,000 in damages from the two defendants, Safeway Stores, Inc. and the Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Alexandria. According to Arthur the money represented medical expenses and "past and future mental anguish."

According to the presiding judge, Albert V. Bryan, Jr., the bottling company's defense was that the mouse could only have gotten into the bottle through "tampering."
(Brunvand 1981: 85)

Story Outline for telling:

"The Mouse in the Coke"

- A man buys a Coke.
- He notices an odd taste.
- He pours out the rest of the drink.
- He finds pieces of a mouse: back legs, tail.
- He's sickened/dies.
- Charges are brought against Coca-Cola Bottling Company.

Lesson 4: Story Differences

This technique is analogous to the technique of "picture differences" in which students work in pairs, each having similar pictures which they describe to each other in order to determine the differences. Students work in pairs, each having a different version of the same story. As each tells the other his/her version of the story, the listener becomes aware of the differences between that story and the one he/she heard or read. It is possible to use this as a reading or a listening exercise to reinforce oral skills. One of the language functions practiced is expressing agreement/ disagreement. It might be useful to use this technique early with students to get them into the habit of paying attention to detail in stories. This technique includes more "rehearsal" (opportunity for students to rehearse what they are going to say with a partner before they have to say it in a larger group situation) than the other techniques presented.

Purpose:
a) to reinforce oral skills (Procedure A: Reading/Speaking, or Procedure B: Listening/ Speaking) -- rehearsal
b) to practice agreeing/disagreeing and paying attention to details of the story.

Space:
Procedure A - 1 room/place.
Procedure B - 2 rooms/places

Materials: Procedure A: 2 versions of the same text (enough copies of each for half the class) **OR** Procedure B: 2 tape recorded tellings of the two versions and 2 tape players (or a language lab with two decks).

Procedure A:

1A. **Before class,** write and make copies of two versions of one story. The versions should begin in the same way so that it is not immediately obvious to the students that they are receiving different versions.

2A. **In class,** distribute the copies to the pairs so that they have different versions (without making it obvious that they are not the same).

3A. Students read silently and prepare to reconstruct the story with their partners. When they have finished reading, collect the papers.

4. In pairs, students try to reconstruct the story, preparing to tell it to another pair.

5. Each pair joins another pair to form groups of four. Students take turns re-telling the story (they may decide how they wish to do this: one begins, another takes over, or each takes a turn telling the entire story as they remember it).

Procedure B:

1B. **Before class,** record two oral versions of one story. The versions should begin in the same way so that it is not immediately obvious to the students that they are receiving different versions.

2B. **In class,** divide the class into two groups. One goes to another place and listens to one version, the other remains and listens to the second version. [Note: If you have a language lab in which students are able to listen to two different tapes, you could do this in the lab.]

3B. Students listen and prepare individually to reconstruct the story with their partners (after they have heard the story, they may jot down notes about what they remember).

4,5 --same as for Procedure A--

To illustrate this technique, I've selected "The Runaway Grandmother":

"The Runaway Grandmother" - Version 1 (story outline for telling):

- A family goes on a camping vacation in Canada.
- Because the grandmother hasn't been feeling too well lately, they are afraid to leave her home alone, so they bring her along.
- They pack everything on top of the station wagon (camping equipment, canoe, etc.), they all get in, and set off for the long drive.
- They set up their camp near the lake. Everyone is enjoying it, except for Grandma who still isn't feeling too well.
- In the night, Grandma dies. The family doesn't know what to do -- it's a strange place, they don't know where or to whom to report the death, etc.
- They decide to go back home (New Jersey).
- They pack everything, roll the grandmother's body in blankets and put it inside the canoe on top of the car.
- They drive for hours. Finally, they stop for lunch at a restaurant (Howard Johnson's).
- After lunch, they come out and discover the car has been stolen. They report the theft to the police, but neither the car nor anything in it (including the body) is ever found.

Version 2:

- A family goes on a camping vacation in Mexico.
- Because the grandmother hasn't been feeling too well lately, they are afraid to leave her home alone, so they bring her along.
- They pack everything on top of the station wagon (camping equipment, etc.), they all get in, and set off for the long drive.
- They set up their camp near a river. Everyone is enjoying it, except for Grandma who still isn't feeling too well.
- In the night, Grandma dies. The family doesn't know what to do -- it's a strange place, they don't know where or to whom to report the death, etc.
- They decide to go back home (Kansas).
- They pack everything, wrap the grandmother's body in a sleeping bag and put it on top of the car with the other luggage.
- They drive for hours. After crossing the border, they stop at a police station and go in to report the death.
- While they are inside, the car is stolen. Neither the car nor anything in it (including the body) is ever found.

For reading:

Version 1:

My friend's cousins live in New Jersey. One summer vacation they went camping in Canada. The whole family went, including the grandmother. They didn't want to leave her alone in New Jersey because she hadn't been feeling well.

So they got up really early in the morning, got into the station wagon and drove north to a beautiful lake in Canada. They set up camp next to the lake and the kids even went out in the canoe before it got dark.

During the night, the grandmother died. When they found her in the morning, they were worried and didn't know what to do. They were far away from the nearest town and didn't know what kind of procedures they would have to go through to get a certificate of death, transport the body, etc.

So, instead of reporting the death to the Canadian police, they simply packed up all their things and got ready to return to New Jersey. They carefully wrapped the grandmother's body in blankets and a tarpaulin and placed it inside the canoe. They tied the canoe securely on top of the car with the other equipment.

It's a long drive back to New Jersey, so they stopped for lunch at a Howard Johnson's restaurant on the way. When they came out of the restaurant after lunch, the car was gone! They reported the theft to the police, but neither the car nor **anything in or on the car** was ever found!

Version 2:

My friend's cousins live in Kansas. One summer vacation they went camping in Mexico. The whole family went, including the grandmother. They didn't want to leave her alone in Kansas because she hadn't been feeling well.

So they got up really early in the morning, got into the station wagon and drove south to a beautiful campsite in Mexico. They set up camp next to a river.

During the night, the grandmother died. When they found her in the morning, they were worried and didn't know what to do. They were far away from the nearest town and didn't know what kind of procedures they would have to go through to get a certificate of death, transport the body, etc.

So, instead of reporting the death to the Mexican officials, they simply packed up all their things and got ready to return to Kansas. They carefully wrapped the grandmother's body in one of the sleeping bags, placed it under the tarpaulin, and tied it securely on top of the car with the other equipment.

It's a long, hot drive back to Kansas, so they stopped at a police station as soon as they crossed the (U.S.) border. They all went into the police station (because it was air-conditioned!). When they came out, the car was gone! Neither the car nor **anything in or on the car** was ever found!

Lesson 5: Newspaper Story

In this technique, one group of students reads the story as a newspaper story and then tells it to a partner from the other group. Students in the second group hear the story version. Pairs are then formed (taking one member from each group) and they exchange stories. This could be a good technique to use in exploring the topic of "Media" by getting students to examine the processes of dissemination and transformation of information.

Purpose:
a) to explore cultural themes
b) to critically examine information found in print media
c) to reinforce Reading/Speaking or Listening/ Speaking skills

Space: 2 rooms/places

Materials: 2 versions of the same text -- one written as a newspaper article (possibly the original), the other written as a story (outline for telling or narrative for reading).

Procedure:

1) Divide the class into two groups.
Give the article to group A. Ask them to read it and list the main facts. Then collect their texts. In pairs they may rehearse in preparing to tell the story to a partner from group B.

Tell the story to group B. In pairs, they prepare to tell the story to a partner from group A. They may rehearse re-telling it.

2) Bring the groups back together. They pair up with members of the other group and exchange stories.
Elicit: Did the story change in the telling?

3) Processing & Analysis:
Provide a list of the following types of questions from which students may choose which they would like to answer. They can go over the responses in pairs.

-1- comprehension questions
-2- elaboration questions
-3- identify-themes questions
-4- relate-to-the-problem questions
-5- identify-message questions

(see examples following "Kentucky Fried Rat", "Mouse in Coke")

4) Possible follow-up: Elicit: Do you believe what you read in the paper? All newspapers? What you hear on the radio? TV? from friends? [truth in media]

The story I have selected is "The Syringe in the Pepsi," but many others originally appeared in the newspaper and would easily fit the form of a short news article.

[News version - modified from an actual article which appeared in the Brattleboro Reformer, June 1993 - see Appendix]

June 1993

Syringe Scare Prompts FDA to Warn Diet Pepsi Drinkers

SEATTLE (AP) - The Food and Drug Administration on Sunday warned Diet Pepsi drinkers in four states to drink from a glass and to examine their soda cans for syringes.

"Obviously if something rattles inside of a can, I'd like to know about it - real fast," said Roger Lowell, district FDA director.

A hypodermic needle was found last week in a sealed soda can. Earl (Tex) and Mary Triplett of Tacoma found a syringe in their can of Diet Pepsi.

Hypodermic needles were found in two sealed soda cans that had been bottled six weeks apart, said Susan Herbert, a spokeswoman for Alpac Corp., the regional bottler and distributor for Pepsi.

No injuries were reported and initial tests showed no sign of contamination in the cans, the FDA said.

Consumers in areas where Alpac distributes - Washington, Oregon, Alaska, Hawaii and the U.S. territory of Guam - should inspect their cans of Diet Pepsi closely before drinking.

[outline versions]

Version 1:

- This happened in Tacoma, Washington; 1993.
- Tex and Mary Triplett bought a six-pack of Diet Pepsi.
- They put them in the fridge. Later, when they opened one of the cans, they found a syringe with a hypodermic needle on it in the can.
- Fortunately, they were not hurt. They reported it to the police and are suing the Pepsi Bottling Company.

Version 2:

- This happened in the Bronx, New York; 1993.
- A 9-year-old boy bought a bottle of Pepsi at a 7-11 convenience store.
- He began drinking it in the store.
- He felt something sharp pricking his gum. He examined the bottle and found a hypodermic needle inside.
- The boy's family is suing the Pepsi Bottling Company.

Lesson 6: Picture Warm-Up

In this technique, a picture is used to begin the schema-building process. The picture should be something that embodies a central theme of the story without leading the students too much. More time is spent in the pre-listening portion of the activity than in the other techniques. The advantage of using this technique is that students are allowed time to bring their own backgrounds to the story before listening.

Purpose:
a) to reinforce listening skills: Students improve their aural comprehension by building schema for top-down processing during the listening activity.
b) to encourage creativity in predicting and imagining what will occur in the story and how the listener will feel about it.

Space: 1 room/place

Materials: 1 text (story outline), 1 picture (or more, if desired/if appropriate)

Procedure:

1) **Before class**, find a picture that will serve as a springboard for schema-building to prepare your students for the story.
For example, the story of "The Choking Doberman" involves a large, black dog, so therefore a picture of a large, black dog could be used. (Alternatively, you could use a picture of a large German Shepherd, or a large Rottweiler but probably not a Saint Bernard, since those are believed to be "friendly, helpful" dogs.)
Show the picture (hang it where everyone can see, pass it around the class, or allow students to gather around and look at it).

2) Give students a few minutes to think about/jot down their:
-- associations/ memories
-- feelings
-- speculation/predictions about the form the story will take

3) Elicit some of these (associations, feelings, predictions, etc.) from students (some useful vocabulary might come out).

4) Tell the story.

5) Give the students time to reflect (think, write, draw).

6) Elicit oral comments/reactions/responses.

7) Solicit versions of the story students may have heard (Welcome the telling of other versions, but don't force students to make up versions.)

Follow-up options:

-- Students tell the story to someone outside of class. Report to the class that person's reactions and/or a version that person told in response. (In an EFL context, this involves translation. In an ESL context, it provides students an opportunity for authentic interaction with native speakers.)
-- Explore content and meaning -- theme(s), message(s)
-- Relate to it --What is its meaning for you? -- compare/contrast cultural aspects using Freire's problem-posing technique (see "Possible Follow-up Activities" section in this chapter).

To illustrate this technique, I've selected "The Choking Doberman":

- A woman comes home from work and finds her large dog lying on the floor, choking.
- She rushes the dog to the vet.
- The vet tells her not to worry, he'll take care of dog, she should go home.
- She returns home, opens the door; the phone is ringing.
- The vet is on the phone. He tells her to leave the house immediately, go to her neighbor's house.
- As she opens the door to leave, she hears the sirens of arriving police cars. The police rush in and search the house.
- They find a burglar in the hall closet, bleeding profusely from one hand.
- The vet arrives and tells the woman he operated on the dog and found two fingers lodged in its throat. He called the police immediately.

Other possible stories to use:

-- "The Hook" -- find a picture of Captain Hook or other villains with hook hands/a secluded lovers' lane-type place, perhaps with a car parked in it, etc.

-- "The Vanishing Hitchhiker" -- find a picture of a car/ a dark rainy night/a white figure on a dark road/a jacket hanging over a tombstone (see variation 13b), etc.

Lesson 7: Word Warm-Up

This technique is similar to the Picture Warm-Up, but a word is used instead of a picture. If you are unable to find a suitable picture but feel that your students require more of a warm up before listening to the story, this technique will be appropriate if you can find a word that will help students build schema.

Purpose:
a) to reinforce listening skills: Students improve their aural comprehension by building schema for top-down processing during the listening activity.
b) to encourage creativity in predicting and imagining what will occur in the story and how the listener will feel about it.

Space: 1 room/place

Materials: 1 text (story outline)

Procedure:

1) Choose one word from your story that could serve as a springboard for schema-building. It should be general enough not to give away the story, but narrow enough not to lead students off on wild tangents.

   For example, if you were to use "The Vanishing Hitchhiker," the word "Ghost" would give the story away. The word "Hitchhiker" would elicit students memories and associations with hitchhiking (in addition to adding it to their vocabulary) and would draw them into the story.

   Write the word on the board and define it if necessary.

2-7) [same as for Picture Warm Up]

To illustrate the technique, I have selected "The Hook":

- Two lovers park in lovers' lane. While they are necking, they listen to the radio.
- A news bulletin comes over the radio reporting the escape of a dangerous criminal described as having a hook instead of a hand on one arm.
- The woman becomes nervous and insists that the guy take her home.
- Reluctantly, he agrees. He screeches out of the lane and speeds to her house.
- When they reach her house, he gets out and goes around to open her door for her. He sees on the handle of the car door a bloody hook.

Words I might select are:
"lovers' lane" "hook (hand)"...

If you used "The Vanishing Hitchhiker," you might use:
"hitchhiker" or "hitchhike"

Possible Follow-up Activities:

Choose one of the themes (elicited from the students or one you think would be rich), e.g. "social effects of living in a youth-oriented, mobile, car-loving society". Elaborate on that theme using:

1. **Questions** -- A variety of questions may be used, rather than simply comprehension questions. You may offer students questions about the content, about their feelings, about what they think happened before or after the story, about whether or not they believe it to be true, etc. Examples of such questions follow the texts in Chapter 5. Morgan and Rinvolucri (1983) suggest that you offer students the opportunity to "take revenge" on questions they don't like by not answering them ("inviting them to take revenge on boring comprehension questions). Once they have chosen the questions they want to answer, they work with a partner to answer them. You should pair students who selected many of the questions with those who crossed out most or all of the questions. (Morgan and Rinvolucri 1983: 13-18)

2. **Brainstorming** -- The whole class participates in brainstorming a list of possible themes or messages. In groups of three, students select a topic from the brainstormed list to discuss and write about, or illustrate pictorially (students draw, paint, etc. illustrations of themes in the story).

3. **Theme word search** -- Prepare a list of possible theme words. Students then work in small groups on topics of common interest from within the list. They discuss

which of the words they feel are relevant to the story and which convey underlying themes. They then write a short essay on a topic of particular interest to them. Morgan and Rinvolucri suggest another activity with theme words in which students work on their own to put the words in order according to which they find most relevant. Students then work in pairs and justify their ranking to their partner. They may change pairs several times. "These explanations re-cycle much of the language heard in the story without making the students retell the story to a person who has just heard the self-same story." (Morgan and Rinvolucri 1983: 26)

4. **Debate** -- Frame the theme or issue as a debate question. Split the class so that students work together to prepare their side of the debate. If the issue selected is a hot one for the class, the debate could be hot! An example of a theme used this way is: from "The Hippie Babysitter" - Should parents leave their children with a babysitter? For & Against.

5. **Responsive writing** -- Students write responses in a reaction/response journal. They should be encouraged to respond to the story as they choose -- describe their feelings about the content, the process, respond to a single theme, idea, character, etc. This could be an ongoing part of your storytelling or reading curriculum.

6. **Problem Posing** -- Analyze through Paolo Freire's problem-posing discussion technique. Using the legend as a "code", students follow (or can be guided through, if this is their first time) the five steps of analyzing a problem.

Students:

1) describe the situation
   "What do you see?"
2) identify the problem/issue
   "What is the problem/issue here?"
3) relate the problem to their own experience
   "Do you recognize this situation?"
4) analyze the reasons for the problem
   "Why is there a problem?"
5) formulate strategies for action
   "What can you do about this? What will you do?"

(Wallerstein 1983)

6. SAMPLES OF FULL TEXTS WITH QUESTIONS AND THEME WORDS

I am including below a few samples of texts of contemporary legends followed by some suggested questions and theme words for use with the texts. The purpose of presenting them here is to show how texts can be formed from story outlines (or vice-versa) and the variety of ways in which we can work with them. It is important to note that since the texts are usually transmitted orally with little concern for accurate reproduction, we have a great deal of latitude in modifying them.

On the other hand, since legends are primarily an oral narrative form, I don't feel that they are appropriate for teaching reading. Although in several of the suggested lesson plans written versions of the texts are used, reading is done for reinforcement of oral skills rather than for reading practice. It is also worth noting that the written versions vary between being very informal (as is the case when they are virtual transcripts of the oral versions) or formal (as is the case when they are from a newspaper, or written in newspaper style).

The stories appear in the following order:

1. "The Vanishing Hitchhiker"	(three versions, mini-outline, questions, theme words)
2. "The Kentucky Fried Rat"	(two versions, questions, sample elaboration/exploration questions for follow-up)
3. "The Syringe in the Pepsi"	(three versions, shared questions/activities with "The Kentucky Fried Rat")

4. "The Licked Hand" (*gory)	(one version, questions, sample "word rose," theme words)
5. "The Cement-Truck Driver's Revenge"	(two versions, "word rose", theme words, questions)

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1.

The Vanishing Hitchhiker (version 1)

This story was told by a teenager in Toronto, Canada, in 1973:

Well, this happened to one of my girlfriend's best friends and her father. They were driving along a country road on their way home from the cottage when they saw a young girl hitchhiking. They stopped and picked her up and she got in the back seat. She told the girl and her father that she just lived in the house about five miles up the road. She didn't say anything after that but just turned to watch out the window.

When the father saw the house, he drove up to it and turned around to tell the girl they had arrived -- but she wasn't there! Both he and his daughter were really mystified and decided to knock on the door and tell the people what had happened.

The people who lived in the house told them that they had once had a daughter who answered the description of the girl the man and his daughter supposedly had picked up, but she had disappeared some years ago and had last been seen hitchhiking on this very road. Today would have been her birthday. (adapted from Brunvand 1981: 24-25)

The Vanishing Hitchhiker (version 2)

This is from South Carolina, around 1935:

A traveling man who lived in Spartanburg was on his way home one night when he saw a woman walking along the side of the road. He stopped his car and asked the woman if he could take her where she was going. She stated that she was on her way to visit her brother who lived about three miles further on the same road. He asked her to get in the car and sit by him, but she said she would sit in the back of the car.

Conversation took place for a while as they rode along, but soon the woman grew quiet. The man drove on until he reached the home of the woman's brother, whom he knew, then stopped his car to let the woman alight. When he looked behind him, there was no one in the car. He thought that rather strange, so he went into the house and informed the brother that a lady had gotten into his car to ride to see him, but when he arrived at the house the lady had disappeared. The brother was not alarmed at all and stated that the lady was his sister who had died two years before. He said that this traveling man was the seventh to pick up his sister on the road to visit him, but that she had never reached his house yet. (Brunvand 1981: 25)

The Vanishing Hitchhiker (version 3)

This was told to me by a friend, Diane on a bus from San Pedro Sula to Tegucigalpa, Honduras, 1993:

A man was driving his truck on this [the San Pedro Sula] road late one rainy night when he saw a woman standing on the side of the road. He pulled over and asked the woman if she needed a lift. She said yes, and got in.

He saw that she was shivering because her dress was soaked through, so he offered her his jacket. She put it on without saying anything.

It wasn't long before they reached her house, but she stopped him from driving all the way up to it. She said she'd walk from the road because she didn't want her mother to hear the truck and wake up. So he dropped her off on the road and continued on towards town.

It wasn't until he got home that he realized that he hadn't taken the jacket back from the girl. By then it was too late to go back, so he waited until the next morning.

Early the next day, he went back to the house where he'd dropped her and asked to see the girl. The man who answered the door seemed confused. He said the girl was his daughter but that she had been dead several years and couldn't possibly have been in his car the night before.

Well, the guy didn't believe it, so the father took him to the cemetery and showed him the grave of the girl. She had indeed died several years before, but **hanging on the gravestone was the man's jacket**.

Mini-Outline:
* a driver at night
* picks up a hitchhiker (female)
* she sits in the back seat
* the driver reaches the house
* the hitchhiker is gone
* the driver informs the residents
* the residents give him an explanation

Possible **Questions** for "The Vanishing Hitchhiker":

1. What do you think about the practice of hitchhiking? Is it safe? What kind of people do it?

2. Is hitchhiking common in the U.S./your country? Is it acceptable?

3. Have you ever hitchhiked? What was it like?

4. Have you ever picked up a hitchhiker on the road? Describe the situation.

5. Do you think the story you heard/told could really have happened?

6. What did the driver of the car look like?

7. What kind of car was he driving?

8. What did the hitchhiker look like? What was she wearing? How old was she?

9. What was the countryside like? Hilly/flat? Trees?

10. What was the weather like? Hot? Cold? Rainy? Windy? Full moon?

11. What was the hitchhiker's home like? What color was it? How many storeys tall was it?

12. Take the role of one of the characters and explain what really happened.

13. Tell why you do or don't believe in ghosts.

14. Describe a situation in which something inexplicable happened to you.

15. Do you think this story could have ocurred in your home neighborhood? How would it have been different?

Themes & Theme Words:

a) Access to a car allows people to distance themselves from their familiar neighborhood.

b) Cars offer a temporary escape from the "humdrum world of home" (Brunvand 1981: 19).

mobile society	tradition	hitchhiking	ghosts
mysterious	superstition	freedom	cars
independence	frightened	family	home
familiar	nighttime horrors ...		...

2.

The Kentucky Fried Rat (version 1 - heard in 1971 from a federal employee in Washington, D.C.):

One night a family went out for Kentucky Fried Chicken. The father came back to the car with the bucket of chicken. The couple and their two kids were all sitting there eating their chicken when the wife said, "My chicken tastes funny." She kept on eating, complaining the whole time.

After a while, the husband said, "Let me see it." He switched the light on and then it was discovered that the woman was eating a rodent, nicely floured and fried crisp. The woman went into shock and was rushed to the hospital.

It was reported that the husband was approached by lawyers representing the Kentucky Fried Chicken chain and offered the sum of $35,000. The woman remained on the critical list for several days. Spokesmen from the hospital would not divulge the facts about the case and nurses were instructed to keep their mouths shut. And it is also reported that a second offer was made for $75,000, and this too was refused. The woman died and presumably the case will come to court.
(Brunvand 1981: 82)

The Kentucky Fried Rat (version 2):

There was a young couple who had just recently gotten married. Both husband and wife had full time jobs, so they shared household duties. One Friday evening they both came home from work too tired to cook, so they decided to order out and spend a romantic evening at home.

The husband went out to pick up the take-out food while the wife arranged the living room so they could sit cozily in front of the fire while they ate. When the husband returned, the fire was already going in the fireplace, soft music was playing, a few candles were lit around the room -- the lighting was dim and very romantic.

They got comfortable on cushions in front of the fire, unwrapped the food, and started eating. At first, everything seemed OK, but after they'd been eating for a while, the woman complained that her food tasted a bit strange. She also thought there might be a hair in the food.

The husband jumped up and immediately turned on the lights. When he turned around, he saw that his wife had fainted. There on her plate, nestled among the rice and vegetables, was a partially eaten fried rat.
(written from the outline made from memory of a story)

Possible **themes/messages** ("The Kentucky Fried Rat", "Mouse-in-Coke", "The Syringe in the Pepsi"):

1) Nowadays women don't always prepare the meals at home, and eating food that is prepared outside your home (outside your supervision) by strangers is risky -- possibly even lethal!

2) Junk food and other fancy modern things from outside the home are dangerous.

3) We live in a very legalistic society. It seems that someone is always being taken to court over something.

4) People seem to be very greedy -- look at the settlements the people in the stories asked for!

Possible **Theme Words:**

contamination	traditional roles	control
food preparation	disgruntled workers	quality
consumption	fast food	"family values"
eating at home	fads	junk food
modern trends	legalistic society	lawyers
soft drinks	large companies	...

[Students work in small groups on topics of common interest, possibly from this list, discuss briefly, then write a short essay on a subtopic from one of the themes above.]

Possible **Questions**:

1. How would you characterize food such as Kentucky Fried Chicken?

2. What other foods/chains fall into this category?

3. Are there a lot of them in this country? Your country? Your neighborhood?

4. Why are there so many/few?

5. What is their function?

6. How does the notion of junk food/fast food fit in with/clash with traditional roles in food preparation? Who traditionally prepares food (here/home country/etc.)? Where is it prepared?

7. Describe the ritual of meals in your home. Is that the traditional way? Tell the similarities and differences and then compare/contrast to the rituals you have observed here/in the USA.

8. What do you think the message of the story is?

9. Why do you think this story is told?

10. Have you ever heard this story? What was the same/different about the story when you first heard it.

11. Did you believe the story to be true? Has the same thing ever happened to you or to someone you know? Could it happen?

12. How did the story make you feel?

13. Do you eat fast food/junk food?

14. Do you feel nervous about eating it now?

15. What can you do to change the existing situation?

16. What do you think happened to the woman (in version 2)?

17. What actions do you think the couple took after that incident (version 2)?

Elaboration:

Describe --

the family	- before KFR (the Kentucky Fried Rat)
	- the members (parents, kids)
the old man	- before MiC (the Mouse in the Coke)
	- after MiC
	- the sales clerk

Exploration:

KFR: What really happened? How did the rat get in there? Was the woman telling the truth? What could be their motives for lying/making up the story? How could this kind of contamination be prevented?

MiC: What do you think really happened? Was the man telling the truth? How could this kind of contamination happen? Why do you think it happens? How could it be prevented? Why do you think people would tell this story?

3.

The Syringe in the Diet Pepsi (version 1) - news story:

June 1993

Syringe Scare Prompts FDA to Warn Diet Pepsi Drinkers

SEATTLE (AP) - The Food and Drug Administration on Sunday warned Diet Pepsi drinkers in four states to drink from a glass and to examine their soda cans for syringes.

"Obviously if something rattles inside of a can, I'd like to know about it - real fast," said Roger Lowell, district FDA director.

A hypodermic needle was found last week in a sealed soda can. Earl (Tex) and Mary Triplett of Tacoma found a syringe in their can of Diet Pepsi.

Hypodermic needles were found in two sealed soda cans that had been bottled six weeks apart, said Susan Herbert, a spokeswoman for Alpac Corp., the regional bottler and distributor for Pepsi.

No injuries were reported and initial tests showed no sign of contamination in the cans, the FDA said.

Consumers in areas where Alpac distributes - Washington, Oregon, Alaska, Hawaii and the U.S. territory of Guam - should inspect their cans of Diet Pepsi closely before drinking.

(adapted from the Brattleboro Reformer, June 1993)

The Syringe in the Diet Pepsi (version 2) - outline:

- This happened in Tacoma, Washington; 1993.
- Tex and Mary Triplett bought a six-pack of Diet Pepsi.
- They put them in the fridge. Later, when they opened one of the cans, they found a syringe with a hypodermic needle on it in the can.
- Fortunately, they were not hurt. They reported it to the police and are suing the Pepsi Bottling Company.

version 2 - what you might hear:

There was a couple who lived in Tacoma, and earlier this year they bought a six-pack of Diet Pepsi, as usual, and put it in their fridge. Later on when they went to drink it, Mary opened her can and was about to take a sip when she heard

something rattling around inside of it. So she and Tex poured out the Pepsi and out came a syringe with a needle attached to it.

Luckily, Mary hadn't even drunk any of it, so she's probably going to be OK, but because of the risk of it, she and Tex are suing the company for thousands of dollars.

The Syringe in the Diet Pepsi (version 3) - outline:

- This happened in the Bronx, New York; 1993.
- A 9-year-old boy bought a bottle of Pepsi at a 7-11 convenience store.
- He began drinking it in the store.
- He felt something sharp pricking his gum. He examined the bottle and found a hypodermic needle inside.
- The boy's family is suing the Pepsi Bottling Company.

version 3 - what you might hear:

There was this kid in the Bronx, I think he was about 9 years old. Anyway, he went into a 7-11 and bought a bottle of Pepsi. He opened it at the counter and was just taking his first sip when he felt something sharp pricking his lip.

He started making a fuss, so the manager looked inside the bottle, and sure enough, there was a hypodermic needle inside. When the boy's family found out, they decided to sue the Pepsi Bottling Company for the emotional trauma the boy had already suffered as well as for future emotional trauma. On the TV news, the boy said, "Every time I go to drink a Pepsi now I'm afraid there might be some needle in there and I might catch AIDS or something."

[Note: The questions and theme words accompanying "The Kentucky Fried Rat" and "The Mouse in the Coke Bottle" can also be used with this story. We could add the following themes: AIDS, public concern about risk connected with unsanitary needles, U.S. tendency to bring lawsuits or make claims in order to generate publicity/self-promotion/fame. We could add the following questions: Did they really find the needles? If so, how did the needles get in the sealed cans/bottles? If not, why would the people make up a story like this?]

4.

The Licked Hand

There was a couple who lived in a big house in the suburbs with their 12-year-old daughter and their big dog. One night they went out to a party at the house of

some friends. Because they knew they were going to be out late, they left the daughter at home with the big dog to guard her.

Before they left, though, they instructed the little girl not to let anyone in the house while they were gone. In fact, they told her that after they left, she should go around the house and make sure all the doors and windows were securely locked shut.

After her parents had left, the girl dutifully went all around the house making sure all the doors and windows were securely closed. She was able to lock all of them except for one tiny window at the back of the house down in the basement. She tried to find a way to lock it, but when she couldn't, she said, "Oh well, but I have my Collie dog here to protect me anyway," and left it unlocked.

Later, when she went to bed, her dog lay down on the floor next to her. As she was falling asleep, she reached down to pat the dog and, as usual, it licked her hand. She drifted off to sleep.

She hadn't been asleep for long when she was awakened by a noise. Frightened, she reached out to the dog for reassurance. It licked her hand. Reassured, she fell back asleep.

Not long after that, she woke up again to the sound of the faucet dripping in the bathroom: drip-drip-drip. She decided to tell her father about it in the morning. Again, she reached for the dog, felt it lick her hand, and drifted off to sleep.

Once more she woke up to the sound of drip-drip-drip, but when she put out her hand and felt the dog lick it, she was reassured and fell back asleep and slept until the morning.

When she got up, she went into the bathroom. There to her horror was her Collie dog, hanging from the shower, with blood still dripping: drip-drip-drip. On the mirror was a note. It said: "Humans can lick hands too.".
(adapted, Brunvand 1984: 73-77)

Questions:

1. What was the parents' responsibility? Do you think they behaved responsibly?

2. What did the parents do to protect the girl? Could they have done anything else?

3. What did the girl do to protect herself? Could she have done anything else?

4. Have you ever heard a story like this?

5. Do you believe the story is true?

6. Describe: the house the family lived in/the family/the dog/the girl's bedroom/the basement & the window.

7. Where did the parents go that night? What did they do?

8. What happened after the girl found the dog and the note? What did she do?

9. Do you think the parents will leave the girl alone at night again? What other actions do you think they will take to change the situation?

10. Tell about the family's life after that night.

11. How did the story make you feel? Has anything like this ever happened to you?

12. Have you ever felt afraid that something might be under your bed at night? What did you do?

13. How do you feel when you are home alone at night?

14. What do you think about having a guard dog in your house? Why do you feel that way?

A "**word rose**" of the story:

little girl

sleeping big dog

killer little window

lick hand

Theme words:

vulnerability	protection	responsibility
parental roles	freedom	childhood
threats	outside world	reassurance
deception	craziness	violence
power	control	female
death	careful	insignificant

5.

The Cement-Truck Driver's Revenge (version 1):

There was a cement-truck driver who lived in the suburbs in Michigan. One day, he was supposed to deliver a load of wet cement mix to an address right near his own house. It was a nice day, so he decided to detour a little and drop by home to see his wife. On the way, he stopped at the florist's and picked up some flowers for her.

When he got home, he was surprised to see a shiny new Cadillac parked in his driveway. He thought this was odd, since he wasn't expecting any visitors, so he went around to the back of the house instead of going in the front door.

As he came around the corner of the house, he could hear voices coming from the kitchen. Taking care not to be seen by the people inside, he peeked to see who was there. He was surprised to see his wife standing talking to a nicely dressed man.

Well, the cement-truck driver didn't stop to ask what he might be doing there in the middle of the day, but instead went back to the front of the house. He rolled down the window of the Cadillac. Then he backed his truck up to the car and started pouring in wet cement until the car was completely full.

When he came back home that evening, he found his wife in tears. What did she have to say for herself?

She explained that the new car was supposed to be a surprise. She had bought it with her hard-earned savings. The stranger was the car dealer who had kindly agreed to deliver the car (since she was unable to drive) and was helping her fill out the forms for the car.

The Cement-Truck Driver's Revenge (version 2):

This story appeared in Bergens Arbeiderblad, a newspaper in Bergen, Norway, on March 6, 1973:

TERRIBLE REVENGE OF A LOVER

A Bergen citizen who several days a week drives a ready-mix cement truck as a second job the other day came by his own residence and saw a friend's car with a sun roof parked there. He stopped the cement truck and went in the apartment building to say hello. But sounds from the bedroom gave him to understand that it wasn't him but rather his wife that the fellow had come to visit. Without disturbing the couple in the bedroom, the man went back out of the building and over to his friend's car. He pulled the sun roof back and backed the cement truck alongside it. Then he switched on the delivery system and filled the parked car with about two cubic meters of cement. When the lover came for his car, the cement was completely hard.

Later in the evening the car was towed away. The case has not been reported to the police.
(Brunvand 1981: 130)

Possible **"Word Rose"**:

cement-truck driver

wife

another man

shiny new car

ruined

jealousy

surprise

Possible **Theme Words:**

marriage	jealousy	snap judgment
infidelity	conflict resolution	revenge
surprise	responsibility	loyalty

Questions:

1. Have you ever heard a story like this?
2. Why did the cement-truck driver do what he did?
3. Do you think the cement-truck driver did the right thing? If so, why? If not, what do you think he should have done?
4. Has anything like this happened to you or someone you know?
5. Do you think the story is true? Why/why not?
6. Describe the house (or apartment) the driver lived in/the new car/the wife/the car dealer (or the friend).
7. How did the driver's wife feel that evening?
8. How did he feel?

9. Have you ever done something that was misinterpreted by your friend/spouse/lover? What was it? How did he/she respond? How did you feel?

10. How do you feel when your friend/spouse/lover betrays you? What do you do?

NOTES:

7. CAVEATS

In the process of considering whether or not to use certain legends in the classroom, teachers should be mindful of the possible effects of introducing violence or gore into the classroom. Teachers should know their students well enough to anticipate whether or not a given legend is likely to be traumatic for students or whether or not it will even interest them.

Many of these legends are told for the purpose of conveying a message or warning about elements of our culture; that kind of warning or message might be inappropriate for younger or less mature students. For example, "The Hippie Babysitter" could frighten junior high school students who may have to be left in the care of babysitters. The same story could also be traumatic for a student whose child has been killed in a drive-by shooting. We should know as much as possible about the lives of our students before introducing this kind of material into the classroom.

On the other hand, as Michael Carroll of the University of Western Ontario (Department of Sociology) points out, "...[violent, gruesome or repugnant] legends...provide us with outlets for expressing fears that are otherwise difficult to express" (Carroll 1992: 225-226). He argues for the use of psychoanalysis in uncovering the meaning of contemporary legends. Again, ESL/EFL classrooms may

not be the best place to introduce this kind of inquiry, but some classroom teachers have found a place for "scary stories."

One teacher who has dared to broach difficult issues in his high school classroom is Michael McClure. He encouraged students to write fiction as part of their composition work "to help them to feel ownership of their own writing and the ideas and feelings expressed in it"(McClure 1991: 93) but was then taken aback when one student's fiction contained a graphic description of a rape/murder (Peter's story). Below is an excerpt from McClure's article:

> For example, Peter's "Blood of Innocents," at least partly because of the power of its graphic portrayal, is a strong lead-in to a wide range of current difficult but vital issues. Dealing with Peter's story in class (as I had led the class to do with other student stories and with professional readings, for that matter), we began by discussing *how* we reacted to a reading. Shock, excitement, and, at least for a few young women, a degree of anger were the most cmmon first reactions. From there we began to discuss *why*, as far as we could speculate, we felt the reactions we did. What connections to related ideas, experiences, issues came to mind? As with many such discussions, a comment from one student sparked more from others -- elaboration, agreement, and sometimes disagreement. If there was any problem with the conversation it was that there was so much happening that it was impossible to follow up any topic as thoroughly as my teacherly self might have wanted.
>
> Among the issues that Peter's story made so accessible were the increase in teenage violence in America, the attitudes that make such a lucrative business out of depicting widespread mayhem in such movies as *Total Recall* and the many movies of the "blood and guts" genre, the fact of how common rape is in our society and the attitudes which perpetuate that fact...and finally, various stereotypes of acceptable gender roles and the politics of contemporary dating. Granted, these issues could all be approached directly through assigned expository readings. But one important benefit of letting them emerge from the class response to a student's story is that writer and audience feel more greatly invested in the meanings so discovered; the issues become theirs instead of merely an agenda I impose on them (McClure 1991: 94).

McClure's article clearly tells us that if a teacher is willing to make the commitment to seeing the process through, bringing these issues into the classroom can be extremely rewarding for students and teacher. He followed up the class discussions by encouraging his students to write more traditional papers, developing their own topics in response to issues raised in class (creating an opportunity for expository writing to spring from the creative writing). It is also important to note that he took an analytical approach in that after reading the story, students discussed their reactions but went on to examine possible causes for those reactions.

This age group (high school/young adults) may be especially suitable for using contemporary legends. Furthermore, in a high school setting, teachers are able to work with the same students over a longer period of time (as compared with the 4- to 8-week terms which others face). Teachers thus have the opportunity to develop a more stable relationship with students. Students in that age group are struggling to make meaning out of the world around them and are coping with many different, often conflicting, pieces of new information. McClure's experience was that "[as the stories show], students are able and more than willing to enter difficult territory"(McClure 1991: 94).

From this same age group (secondary school students in Britain, 16- to 21-year-olds), a woman named Sara Delamont collected stories the students had been told when they were about to leave junior high school to go to high school. She discusses the themes found in the stories, focusing on messages about sex roles. She found that many of the stories contained scary elements. The students who told her the stories

had been scared by them when they first heard them and even remembered details vividly several years after hearing them (Delamont 1991). Since at the time the stories were collected the mystery and imagined dangers were already past, the students were no longer frightened by the stories, but I would guess that class discussions/ analysis of them would be animated.

Finally, contemporary legends are not a panacea for teachers seeking meaningful content for their classes. Teachers should try using one or two stories and see whether the students are interested and whether they can in fact generate their own versions. If students are not interested, stories should not be forced on them. Also, I would not recommend using only gory/scary stories -- perhaps only one. Contemporary legends are, however, a rich source for those whose classroom situations lend themselves to using controversial materials.

8. CONCLUSION

In this paper I have looked at the form and possible uses for contemporary legends in the ESL/EFL classroom. Contemporary legends are a form of oral narrative currently being transmitted in all cultures not only from one person to another but also through a variety of media. The legends can be found in newspapers, in magazines, or on office bulletin boards where they are presented as transcripts of tales of events that "actually happened." They can be new versions of traditional folktales or all-new stories to fit new cultural elements. They may seem very much like traditional folktales (double repetition of an element or phrase in the story, good winning out over evil, etc.) or they may seem so plausible as to be unrecognizable as legends (the severed fingers stories, the contamination stories, etc.). In addition, when many people in the group of listeners have heard some version of the story, it **adds** to the credibility of the tale ("I've heard that...", "So have I!"..., "Well, if everyone has heard it, it **must** be true.", "No, but really, I saw the report on TV!", etc.).

Because the legends are well-known in many societies, and given the fact that students enjoy the familiar, the legends are appealing to students. In an ESL context, students have an opportunity to ask native speakers about the stories outside of the classroom. By asking native speakers about a story they have heard, they will have

to tell the story, and in addition they may be told another version: it provides an opportunity for a genuine exchange. In an EFL context, students can still gather information about the stories, but they will have the additional challenge of translating information about their own culture into the target language. (Note that because this type of legend is common across cultures, there is no reason why one couldn't use, say, Spanish language contemporary legends in the teaching of Spanish.)

These legends can be used both to teach culture and to develop communication skills. Teachers can guide students in analyzing the cultural codes in the texts through a process in which students also examine their own beliefs and values. We can learn not only about prejudices and stereotypes but also about the way in which values are transmitted in a culture. One advantage of the issues in the legends being emotionally loaded is that the tension created by the emotional content is often what helps motivate students to discuss issues. I believe that if a critical approach (such as using Paolo Freire's problem-posing technique) is used in analyzing the legends, the threatening aspect of the (gory or violent) legends will be diminished and the students' power to deal with central issues in the legend (or in their lives) will be increased.

In addition, the legends serve as compelling content for helping students develop communicative skills. Students are motivated to use target language skills to transmit and to understand the content of the legends. By creating information gap activities with these stories, the need to communicate becomes genuine. In the sample lessons in this paper, I have shown ways in which all four language skills can be reinforced using the legends.

Perhaps the most important aspect of using contemporary legends is that they are a form which is accessible to any teacher. I have attempted to show how outlines for telling can be distilled from whole stories and how new forms (such as mock newspaper articles) can be generated from outlines or stories one has heard. My aim in doing this has been to encourage teachers to generate their own materials from stories they and their students know. In addition to helping teachers who have limited access to target language materials, the stories themselves are cultural artifacts which merit consideration in the language and culture classroom.

In conclusion, contemporary legends are not a new form, but they have only fairly recently begun to be recognized as an authentic form of folklore. They are found in cultures around the world and are easily accessible to teachers. I believe they are a rich and versatile source for use in the teaching of language and culture.

Syringe scare prompts FDA to warn Diet Pepsi drinkers

SEATTLE (AP) – The Food and Drug Administration on Sunday warned Diet Pepsi drinkers in four states to drink from a glass and to examine their soda cans for syringes.

"Obviously if something rattles inside of a can, I'd like to know about it – real fast," said Roger Lowell, district FDA director.

Hypodermic needles were found last week in two sealed soda cans that had been bottled six months apart, said Susan Herbert, a spokeswoman for Alpac Corp., the regional bottler and distributor for Pepsi.

No injuries were reported and initial tests showed no sign of contamination in the cans, the FDA said.

Consumers in areas where Alpac distributes – Washington, Oregon, Alaska, Hawaii and the U.S. territory of Guam – should inspect their cans of Diet Pepsi closely before drinking.

AP

A SYRINGE AND NEEDLE rest inside a Pepsi Cola can that was found in New Orleans Tuesday.

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Brattleboro Reformer, 15 June 1993

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Pepsi plans no recall as tampering reports spread

NEW YORK (AP) – People reported finding syringes in Pepsi cans in several more states and Pepsi-Cola Co., a prolific advertiser and aggressive marketer, took a low-profile response Tuesday.

The Food and Drug Administration said it was looking into at least a dozen complaints of syringes or other foreign objects in Pepsi cans and bottles in nine states.

The FDA refused to identify the states, but complaints have come from at least eight states: Washington, Louisiana, Missouri, Ohio, Oklahoma, Iowa, Illinois and Wyoming.

FDA Commissioner David Kessler said the complaints appeared unrelated, and once "an initial complaint of tampering receives widespread publicity, there are always subsequent complaints, many of which turn out to be false."

The first reports came last week with consumers saying they found hypodermic needles in two cans of Diet Pepsi in Washington state. Kessler said the FDA found the needles weren't contaminated.

More recent reports have involved other types of Pepsi.

The soft-drink maker, whose beverages are bottled at more than 400 locations, said there was no evidence the tampering occurred during manufacturing.

"We have yet to confirm that any of these reports concern an unopened container," said Andrew Giangola, a Pepsi spokesman. "There have been no injuries reported, and there is no health risk to consumers. We see no reason for a product recall and the FDA concurs."

But there were signs of growing uneasiness.

A grocery in Iowa pulled all Pepsi products from the shelves Tuesday after a customer reported finding a syringe in a can of regular Pepsi purchased Sunday.

A Gretna, La., woman became the third person near New Orleans to report finding a needle in a can of Pepsi purchased Monday night.

Police said a Rock Springs, Wyo., woman reported Monday she found a syringe with a needle attached in one of 12 cans of Pepsi she purchased last week at a Rock Springs store.

A woman in the Chicago suburb of Glen Ellyn told police Tuesday she found a syringe in a can of Caffeine Free Diet Pepsi she bought from a vending machine at a car dealer where she works.

Pepsi, normally a prolific advertiser, made no immediate moves to fashion its own print or TV commercials to comment on the situation.

Giangola said the company planned to make a video of the Pepsi production process available to television stations to show how difficult it would be to insert foreign objects into a can.

The cans are usually turned upside down, blasted with hot air and water, then flipped to be filled and sealed. The process takes only seconds.

Industry analysts generally applauded Pepsi's approach, arguing it faced a much different situation than Johnson & Johnson did when it recalled Tylenol after contaminated bottles were found several years ago.

Drug packages at the time could be opened and altered without much notice, but soft drinks are usually in pressurized, sealed cans that would make tampering obvious.

Brattleboro Reformer, 16 June 1993

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